



National Agricultural  
Marketing Council  
Promoting market access for South African agriculture

# Markets and Economic Research Centre

## Macroeconomic Digest



*An Update on Selected  
Macroeconomic Indicators*

*Labour – November 2024*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) published by Stats SA provides an overview of the observed changes in key labour market indicators between the second quarter (April - June) of 2024 and the third quarter (July – September) of 2024. The results of the QLFS indicate that the number of employed persons increased by 294 000 to 16.9 million in the third quarter of 2024 compared to the second quarter of 2024, while the number of unemployed persons decreased by 373 000 to 8.0 million during the same quarter.

According to Stats SA (2024) the number of discouraged work-seekers increased by 160 000 (5.0%), and the number of people who were not economically active for reasons other than discouragement increased by 54 000 (0.4%) between the two quarters, resulting in an increase of 214 000 in the not economically active population. Consequently, an increase in employment and a decrease in unemployment resulted in a decrease of 1.4 percentage points in the unemployment rate to 32.1% in the third quarter of 2024.



The quarter-on-quarter (Q2-2024 and Q3-2024) comparison shows that employment increased in six industries, with agricultural sector recording an increase of 39 000 (4.4%) quarter-on-quarter (q/q) basis, reaching 935 000 people employed in the sector.

The provincial comparative analysis shows that, Gauteng (41.8%), Northern Cape (17.1%) and Limpopo (14.4%) recorded the largest increases in agricultural employment in Q3: 2024, while Mpumalanga, Free State and Kwazulu-Natal recorded the largest decreases at 13.4%, 7.4% and 4.3%, respectively. Overall, quarter-to-quarter agricultural employment estimations shows that employment increased by 4.4% (39 000) in the third quarter of 2024. During the third quarter of 2024, the number of women employed in agriculture increased by 10 000 (3.8%), while the number of men increased by 29 000 (4.6%) compared to the second quarter 2024.

## Introduction

The Macroeconomic Digest Labour Report of the third quarter of 2024 provides an overview of employment figures by industry, province and gender composition in the agricultural sector. The figures in this publication are based on data from Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) released on 12 November 2024. The Stats SA report can be accessed online:

<https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/P02113rdQuarter2024.pdf>

### 1. Employment by Industry

The Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) published by Stats SA provides an overview of the observed changes in key labour market indicators between the third quarter (July - September) of 2024 and the second quarter (April - June) of 2024. The number of employed persons increased by 294 000 to 16.9 million in the third quarter of 2024, while the number of unemployed persons decreased by 373 000 to 8.0 million compared to the second quarter of 2024, resulting in a decrease of 79 000 (0.3%) in the labour force. According to Stats SA (2024) the number of discouraged work-seekers increased by 160 000 (5.0%), and the number of people who were not economically active for reasons other than discouragement increased by 54 000 (0.4%) between the two quarters, resulting in an increase of 214 000 in the not economically active population. Consequently, an increase in employment and a decrease in unemployment resulted in a decrease of 1.4 percentage points in the unemployment rate to 32.1% in the third quarter of 2024.

**Table 1** shows employment by industry between the third quarter of 2024 and the second quarter of 2024. Six out of the ten industries experienced an increase in the number of employed persons. Notably, community and social services increased by 194 000, followed by construction (176 000) and trade 109 000 industries. During this period agricultural employment increased by 39 000. Employment in the finance, private households, manufacturing and transport industries decreased by 189 000, 32 000, 20 000 and 18 000, respectively.

The notable increase in employment within the agricultural sector may be attributed to seasonal demand for labour as it coincides with the peak of the harvest season for various crops. It is worth noting that some part of the country experienced better than expected rainfall resulting in optimal increase in crops and livestock productivity, potentially boosting employment.

**Table 1: Quarterly employment, quarter-to-quarter and year-on-year changes**

Industry	Jul-Sep 2023	Apr-Jun 2024	Jul-Sep 2024	Qtr.-to-qtr. change	Year-on-year change	Qtr.-to-qtr.	Year-on-year change
	Thousand				Percentage (%)		
<b>Total*</b>	<b>16 745</b>	<b>16 652</b>	<b>16 946</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>1.8%</b>	<b>1.2%</b>
Agriculture	956	896	935	39	-21	4.4%	-2.2%
Mining	409	457	484	27	75	6.0%	18.4%
Manufacturing	1 508	1 655	1 635	-20	127	-1.2%	8.4%
Utilities	113	114	127	13	14	11.7%	12.7%
Construction	1 357	1 204	1 381	176	24	14.7%	1.7%
Trade	3 390	3 360	3 469	109	79	3.2%	2.3%

Industry	Jul-Sep 2023	Apr-Jun 2024	Jul-Sep 2024	Qtr.-to-qtr. change	Year-on-year change	Qtr.-to-qtr.	Year-on-year change
	Thousand					Percentage (%)	
Transport	966	1 064	1 047	-18	81	-1.7%	8.3%
Finance	2 836	2 905	2 716	-189	-120	-6.5%	-4.2%
Community and social services	4 084	3 827	4 021	194	-62	5.1%	-1.5%
Private households	1 116	1 160	1 128	-32	12	-2.8%	1.1%

\*Note: Total includes "other" industry. Due to rounding, numbers do not necessarily add up to totals.

Source: Stats SA, 2024

**Table 2** illustrates employment trends in agriculture per province. Three provinces recorded the largest increase in employment in the agricultural sector, while three recorded a largest decrease between the second quarter of 2024 and the third quarter of 2024. Gauteng (41.8%), Northern Cape (17.1%) and Limpopo (14.4%) recorded the largest increases in agricultural employment in Q3: 2024, while Mpumalanga, Free State and Kwazulu-Natal recorded the largest decreases at 13.4%, 7.4% and 4.3%, respectively. During the review period, rain-fed agriculture experienced significant recovery due to favourable rains in many areas of South Africa, leading to an increase in farming operations and agricultural employment. The year-on-year comparison employment in agriculture decreased by 21 000, translating to a 2.2% decrease.

**Table 2: Agricultural employment by province**

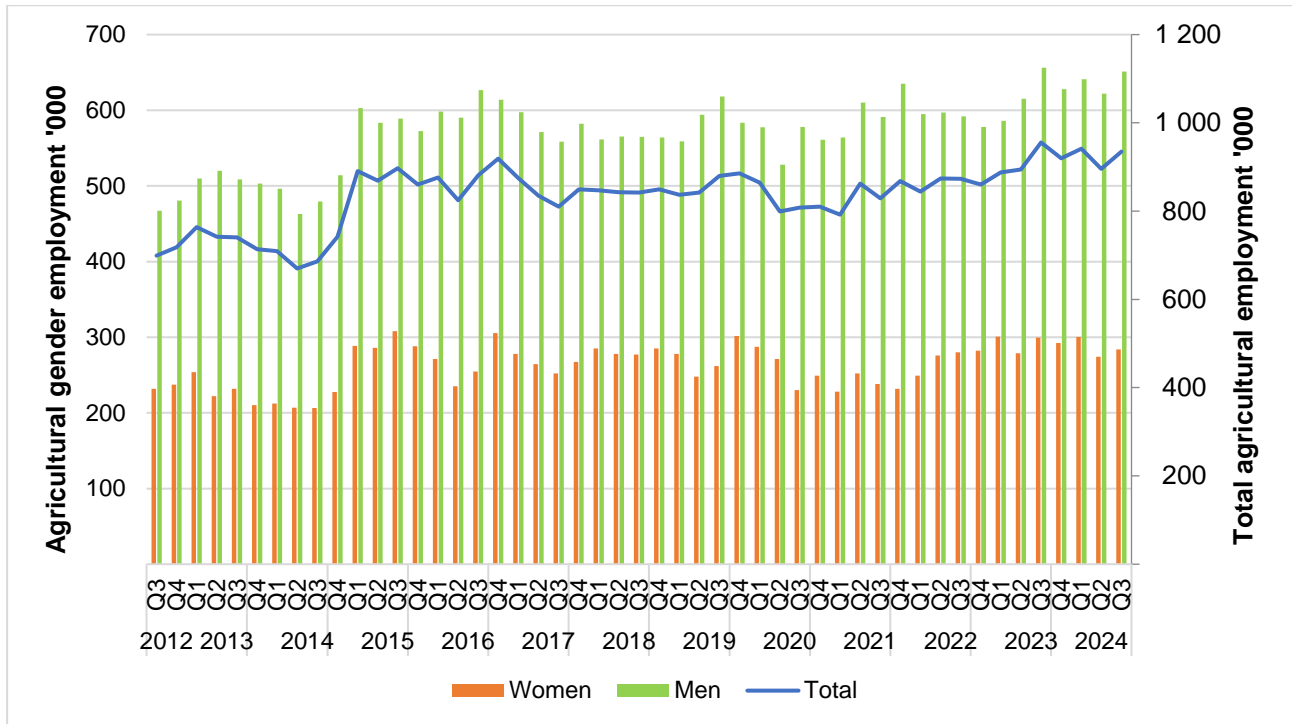
Employment by Agriculture per province	Jul-Sep 2023	Apr-Jun 2024	Jul-Sep 2024	Qtr.-to-qtr. Change	Year-on-year change	Qtr.-to-qtr. change	Year-on-year change
	Thousand					Percentage (%)	
<b>Total Agriculture</b>	<b>956</b>	<b>896</b>	<b>935</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>-21</b>	<b>4.4%</b>	<b>-2.2%</b>
Western Cape	238	162	175	13	-63	8.0%	-26.5%
Eastern Cape	136	113	124	10	-12	9.2%	-9.2%
Northern Cape	52	33	39	6	-14	17.1%	-26.0%
Free State	65	84	78	-6	13	-7.4%	20.6%
KwaZulu-Natal	150	151	145	-7	-5	-4.3%	-3.4%
North West	51	56	62	6	11	10.7%	21.4%
Gauteng	39	33	47	14	9	41.8%	22.9%
Mpumalanga	87	126	109	-17	23	-13.4%	26.0%
Limpopo	138	136	156	20	18	14.4%	13.1%

Source: Stats SA, 2024

## 2. Gender composition of employment in the agricultural sector

The agriculture sector, an important component of many economies globally, has historically had a significant gender imbalance in its employment. This is evidenced by the significant disparity in the number of women employed in agriculture compared to their male counterparts. The gender makeup of employment in the agricultural industry is critical in understanding the dynamics of labour distribution and its consequences for food security, poverty reduction, and general development.

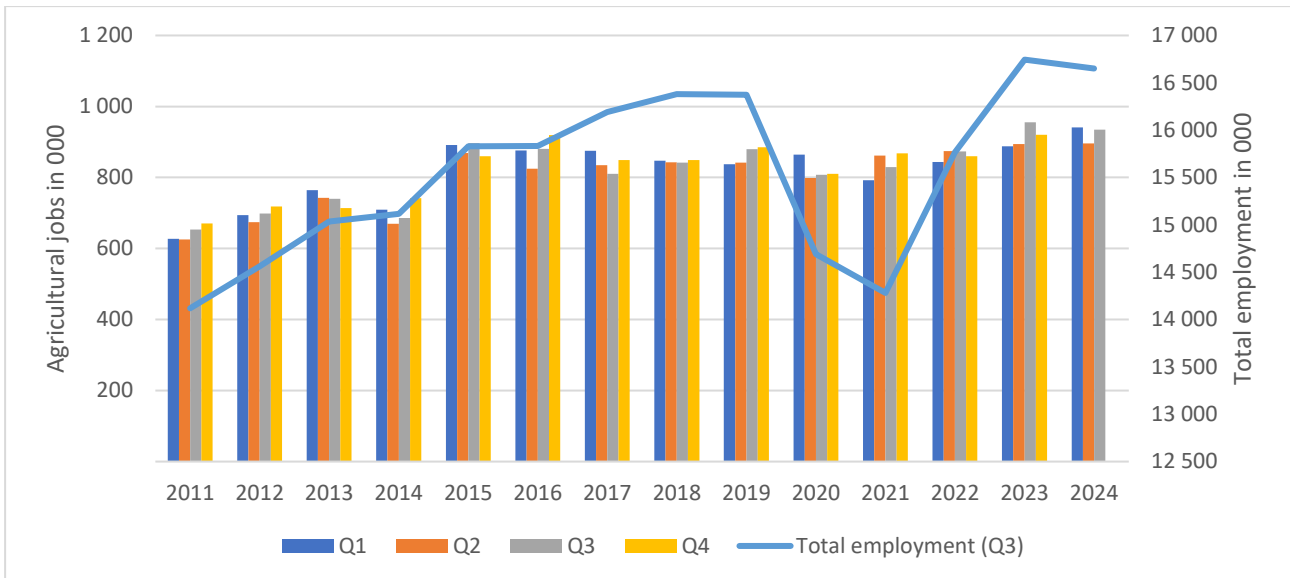
**Figure 1** provides an overview of the employment situation and gender distribution in the agricultural sector. Data from Stats SA (2024) show that men have been the key player in the agriculture sector from the third quarter of 2012 to the third quarter of 2024. In the third quarter of 2024, the number of men and women actively involved in agriculture was 651 000 and 284 000, respectively. During the third quarter of 2024, the number of women increased by 10 000 (3.8%), while the number of men increased by 29 000 (4.6%) compared to the previous quarter. When combining both genders, the number of people employed in agriculture increased by 39 000 (4.4%) for the third quarter of 2024.



**Figure 1: Gender distribution in agriculture**

Source: Stats SA, 2024

**Figure 2** illustrates the long-term trends of employment in the agricultural sector on a quarterly basis since 2011. Long-term trends reveal a substantial increase in agricultural employment. However, there are periods when agricultural employment declined, which is illustrated in **Figure 2**. These periodic decreases can be attributed to seasonal employment, longer dry spells and unfavourable farming seasons as farmers tend to hire more workers during specific periods of a particular marketing season. On a long-term basis, employment increased by 43.2%, from 653 000 jobs in the third quarter of 2011 to 935 000 in the third quarter of 2024. When comparing agricultural employment to overall employment in South Africa in quarter 3, agriculture employed about 5.5% of the employed pool, making the sector essential in the employment of South African citizens.



**Figure 2: Employment trends in the agricultural sector**

Source: Stats SA, 2024

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Stats SA is acknowledged for assistance provided to the NAMC in terms of data.

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